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Twenty-second special session

Official Records

4th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 28 September 1999, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 3

Credentials of representatives to the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly

(b) Report of the Credentials Committee (A/S-22/8)

The President: The Assembly will now take action on the recommendations of the Credentials Committee set forth in paragraph 15 of its report. The Credentials Committee adopted this draft resolution without a vote. May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution S-22/1).

The President: We have thus concluded our consideration of item 3 (b).

Before we take up the next item on the agenda for this afternoon, I wish to recall for delegations that the General Assembly, at its 1st plenary meeting on 27 September, decided the following three non-governmental organizations could make statements in the debate in the plenary at its twenty-second special session: the Caribbean Conservation Association, the Pacific Concerns Resource Centre and the Pan African Movement. Accordingly, those three non-governmental organizations will be added to the end of the list of speakers for the last meeting this evening.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Surin Pitsuwan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Thailand.

Mr. Pitsuwan (Thailand): It is my honour to speak before Your Excellency, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Namibia and President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. I should like to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the twenty-second special session, on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. I have every confidence that under your able guidance this special session will yield fruitful results.

It was just two weeks ago that we welcomed the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga into the family of the United Nations. The fact that the newest members of this body are small island developing States serves to remind us of a long-cherished principle that all States, regardless of size, have an important and integral role to play in advancing the cause of peace and prosperity for mankind. At the same time, we are ourselves reminded that small island developing States have special needs and interests which we should endeavour to address.

00-40550 (E)

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This special session of the General Assembly, thus, could not be more timely. Small island developing States, mostly tiny specks of land surrounded by endless blue sea, present special cases in efforts toward sustainable development. Although unrivalled in natural beauty, these islands are based on fragile ecosystems and are thus extremely vulnerable. Rising sea levels, natural disasters, accidents related to maritime transport, diminished freshwater and coastal and marine resources, and problems associated with tourism and energy use put tremendous pressures on the islands' ecosystems and economies.

The international community and small island States must therefore confront these challenges in partnership, as agreed in the 1994 global conference in Barbados. The task at hand is to review the progress made in the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action and to find effective means to support the efforts of small island developing States in realizing the objectives of the plan.

Climate change and its effects on sea levels pose a critical threat to small island developing States. Beyond the issue of economic repercussions is the very question of survival. There is therefore an urgent need for the international community, especially the industrialized countries, to live up to their commitments to curb emissions of greenhouse gases, pursuant to the governing United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the related treaties. Developed countries are obliged to provide small islands with environmentally sound technologies to help mitigate the impact of climate change.

For its part, Thailand continues to support firmly global efforts for greenhouse gas reduction. As a party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Royal Thai Government has implemented various programmes to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as energy conservation campaigns. The Thai Cabinet also recently endorsed the signing and advanced the ratification process of the Kyoto Protocol, demonstrating our strong determination to help ameliorate the effects of global warming.

Small island developing States are unfortunately often subjected to forces beyond their control. Natural calamities and accidents, such as those involving maritime transport, have a strong adverse impact on the islands' economy and ecology. Thailand therefore supports efforts, within both bilateral and multilateral contexts, to assist these States in dealing with both natural and man-made disasters.

Effective implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action requires resources that small island developing States can ill afford. Mobilization of resources from external sources to complement scarce domestic assets is essential. Strengthening institutions, developing human resources and transfer of technology — all key components in the effort to promote capacity-building in these States — require adequate financing. It is therefore unfortunate that there has been a steady decline in official development assistance from donor countries to these island States. Without adequate financial resources, small islands are hard pressed to protect the environment, and they face pressures to favour short-term growth over long-term conservation of resources. What is most needed is access to predictable flows of new and additional financial resources. The donor community is urged to make its best efforts to increase its level of official development assistance to reach the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of the gross national product.

The substantial drop in external financing is made worse by a shortfall in export revenues for island States, due in part to downward trends in commodity prices. This has affected the islands' overall ability to sustain economic growth and development, reduced standards of living and threatened the islands' environmental systems.

In this regard, Thailand has provided trade preferential treatment to some small island developing States under the scheme of the Global System of Trade Preferences among Developing Countries; it furthermore has decided to offer voluntary and unilateral tariff reduction for a number of products imported from some small island developing States, with a view towards enhancing market access for their exports. Developed countries, in the spirit of genuine partnership, can indeed chip in by increasing market access and providing preferential treatment for the exports from small island States within the framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements.

The most valuable asset of the small island developing States is their human resources. Capacity-building remains critical in the long-term efforts of these island States to achieve sustainable development. For this reason, Thailand, in collaboration with donor countries and international organizations, grants fellowships to South Pacific island States under the Thai International Cooperation Programme. Participants in this programme are trained in Thailand in various sectors, such as public health, agriculture and the environment. Despite the current recession, Thailand remains

committed to joining hands with the donor community in continuing to provide technical cooperation and assistance, within our present capacity, to these countries.

Small island States are an integral part of the international community. Agenda 21 underscores the importance of global partnership on the common and differentiated responsibilities of nations towards sustainable development. As a developing country, Thailand sympathizes with the challenges that these islands face and strongly appeals to the international community not to lose sight of their progress and welfare in the fast-paced world characterized by intensified globalization and increased interdependence. The interests of these small island States are as important to the global development agenda as are the larger issues of poverty eradication and environmental protection worldwide.

The partnership and goodwill to which many of us committed ourselves five years ago in Barbados need to be strengthened — at the very least to sustain the economic viability of these islands and to preserve the many forms of rare natural beauty that exist only in those island States.

The President: I now call on Her Excellency The Honourable Janet Bostwick, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas.

Ms. Bostwick (Bahamas): The Bahamas welcomes the convening of this special session and will work cooperatively with you and the Assembly as we consider the modalities for improving the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS). This special session comes at a critical time, when the concerns articulated in Barbados are even more pronounced. The very survival of small island developing States is at stake.

Small island developing States are prominent among countries which have suffered the devastating consequences of climate change, including a continued and perceptible rise in global temperatures, sea level rise, and devastating hurricanes. It is just days since the entire Bahamas archipelago experienced the impact of hurricane Floyd, which caused significant damage to infrastructure and property. Families lost their homes, business suffered extensive loss, and the agricultural and fisheries sectors were seriously affected. In one of our northern islands, the sea surged miles inland. We were fortunate that there were only two hurricane-related deaths.

The challenge of rebuilding after such a major natural disaster is daunting for any country. It is especially so for a small archipelagic State such as the Bahamas, which must duplicate all response and recovery efforts several times over — with only limited capacity to do so.

On behalf of the Government and people of the Bahamas, I express our profound appreciation for the generous support provided to date by States, international agencies and good neighbours.

This special session is a time of reckoning. The small island developing States have taken the initiative to move the Barbados Programme of Action forward. The Bahamas, for its part, is implementing the objectives of the Programme of Action. In 1994 we established the Bahamas Environment, Science and Technology Commission (BEST). BEST performs a coordinating, collaborative and consultative function in matters relating to sustainable development and the protection and preservation of the environment. In 1995 the Bahamas appointed an Ambassador for the Environment.

The BEST Commission is responsible for the development of the Government's environmental strategies. These include the National Conservation Strategy; the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, which is being developed with the assistance of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); the Institutional Strengthening Project, supported by the Inter-American Development Bank; and the Strategic Fisheries Plan. The forestry policy, which has already been approved, provides for the proper management of forestry resources. The Government plans further measures, such as the enactment of comprehensive environmental legislation and education of both nationals and visitors on environmentally sustainable principles.

We will avoid cynicism and charges of abandoned commitments. Our recent experiences oblige us to be pragmatic and action-oriented and to approach this SIDS review with a sense of urgency. We prefer to focus and build on examples of results-based partnerships and joint action that have enabled progress to be made in meeting the challenges which small island developing States face.

Notable examples of such cooperation include the memorandum of understanding currently being developed among key individuals and institutions in the wider Caribbean, and the Caribbean Planning for Adaptation of Global Climate Change, which is funded by the Global

Environment Facility and assisted by the Organization of American States. The latter initiative represents an important first step towards enabling Caribbean Community countries to adapt to global warming, sea level rise and climate change. The Bahamas will have the privilege of participating, together with Belize and Jamaica, in the coral reef monitoring component of this project.

Even as we recognize the progress made, we are aware that science and technology for sustainable development is one of the areas in which more needs to be done. The transfer of environmentally sound technology, capacity-building — particularly in the areas of research and development — and the training and availability of qualified scientists on a sustained basis are essential. Training opportunities available at present through regional and sub-regional alliances and international assistance need to be strengthened.

The Barbados Conference underscored the importance of developing vulnerability indices and other indicators that reflect the status of small island developing States and integrate ecological fragility and economic vulnerability. We urge the United Nations and other international organizations to study this matter carefully and to produce, by 2000, an index that accurately reflects the situation of small island developing States.

Recognition of the Caribbean Sea as a special area would mean that these waters would receive appropriate protection. Users would be required to act in a manner consistent with the special area concept. In the event of accidents relating to maritime transport, emergency response measures would be improved so as to prevent environmental degradation.

May I take this opportunity to express our appreciation to those who have supported the countries of the Caribbean Community in our initiative, particularly in the consideration of our draft resolution on the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development. We commend this draft resolution as one having special merit, which we hope would in due course be adopted by consensus.

The Barbados Programme of Action provided the initial chart to find ways and means to ensure the sustainable development of small island developing States. Regrettably, this chart has not yet taken them out of troubled waters, and they continue to be buffeted by environmental challenges, globalization and/or economic constraints. The time has come for the international community to recognize that the survival of the small island developing States is an imperative for us all.

The Bahamas supports the further review of the Barbados Programme of Action in 2004. We hope that this current review will result in renewed commitment and a redoubling of efforts, so that marked progress will be evident in our 2004 review.

The President : I now call on Her Excellency, Mrs. Lila Ratsifandriamanana, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Madagascar.

Mrs. Ratsifandriamanana (Madagascar) *(spoke in French)*: Mr. President, the very sincere and warm congratulations that the delegation of the Republic of Madagascar addresses to you on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this special session are extended to you as a talented diplomat and as a worthy representative of Namibia, a country with which Madagascar is honoured to enjoy a very long-standing relationship of fraternal cooperation.

I should like to take this opportunity to reiterate our active support for the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the tireless efforts he has made to defend the noble ideals of our Organization.

To the Republics of Kiribati and Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga, we bid welcome to the great family of the United Nations.

My delegation welcomes the special importance that our Assembly is according to the particular problems of the small island developing States in convening this special session to assess the progress made in the implementation of the Programme of Action adopted five years ago.

Madagascar is an island in the southwest of the Indian Ocean, 400 kilometres east of the Mozambique coast. Although Madagascar is a large island, every day we face the problems shared by small island States. These include the tropical cyclones that Madagascar is prone to five months out of the year; technological disasters such as oil spills at sea and, in recent months, the mysterious cargoes of toxic wastes that crossed the southern part of the ocean; the plunder of our biological resources; coastal erosion; and the deterioration of our cultural heritage as a result of the aggression of Western cultures. It is for these reasons that my country has

followed with special interest the work done at various international forums to deal with these problems.

Since Barbados, Madagascar has participated in the following meetings: the project design workshop held in Turin in 1995, the training workshop on cooperation among African small island States cooperation held in Mauritius in 1997, the inter-regional workshop on small island developing States held in Turin in 1997, and the ministerial conference on the small island developing States of the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic held in Malta in November 1998. This short overview is merely to stress the interest we attach to the activities of the small island developing States.

We are in New York today to reaffirm once again our commitment to the Alliance of Small Island States and to point out that despite its admittedly large size, Madagascar is nevertheless an island that shares the same concerns and constraints as the other islands of the world. The challenges in this area are many and varied; they are economic, political, social, environmental and cultural.

Since we are now taking stock and since all the aspects, gravity and complexities of these problems have been previously analyzed and brought to the attention of the international community as a whole, I will not dwell on them; particularly as previous speakers before me have already referred to them. Allow me briefly, however, to recall the efforts that my country has made to meet these challenges.

At the international level, Madagascar last year ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. At the regional level, Madagascar is participating in the establishment of a regional policy for sustainable development with the Indian Ocean Commission. That policy will be ratified at the second summit of heads of State and Government, to be held on 3 December 1999. That regional policy for sustainable development includes the waste management project for the small island developing States of the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, the regional project to combat hydro-carbon spills, financed by the Global Environment Facility and the World Bank, is now operational.

At the national level my Government has established an environmental plan of action in which the management of coastal areas and biodiversity are among our priorities.

Finally, I wish to stress the importance we attach to trade, which has been identified as one of seven priority areas by the ministerial conference held in Malta on 27 November 1998.

Regional integration is a response to globalization, and Madagascar was the first country of the Indian Ocean Commission to notify the Secretariat of its decision to implement on a reciprocal basis the first stage of an 80 per cent tariff reduction this year for products coming from member countries. This tariff preference granted to member countries is a prelude to a free trade zone.

These are some of the achievements that have been made in our region and in my country. These efforts would be futile without the support of the international community. I need not recall that the implementation of the Programme of Action, which is the goal of these initiatives, is based on a tripartite partnership at the national, regional and international levels.

Having participated actively in the preparatory process for this session, my delegation shares the views expressed in the documents submitted to us with regard to the assessment of the commitments undertaken by the small island States themselves and by the rest of the international community. We would like to reaffirm on this occasion our commitment to continue to implement the Programme of Action. We also join in requesting the international community to provide effective means to do so; in particular, adequate, predictable, new and additional financial resources pursuant to chapter 33 of Agenda 21 and paragraphs 91 to 95 of the Programme of Action.

While we endorse the priority areas set out in the final document of our meeting, we wish nevertheless to stress the strengthening of technical, institutional and financial assistance in the areas of conservation, the management and sustainable use of coastal resources and ecosystems, combating waste flows, and support for regional and subregional mechanisms and arrangements, particularly in the area of trade.

In conclusion, I would like to stress the important role that the United Nations should play in implementing the Programme of Action, particularly through the Commission on Sustainable Development. I should also like here to thank the countries, international bodies and other organizations that have provided us support in the implementation of our development strategies with regard to the specific problems of small island developing States.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, Mr. Ali Alatas.

Mr. Alatas (Indonesia): It is a great honour and privilege for me to participate in the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly to review and appraise the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action five years after its adoption in 1994. I should like to convey our appreciation to the Chairman of the Group of 77 for his enlightening statement on this important issue at the outset of our discussions.

Small island developing States are often exotic and spectacular in their beauty. They also play a unique role as sanctuary to innumerable ecological and bio-diverse resources. But their ecosystems are fragile and their populations are vulnerable to many development challenges. Their small size magnifies their problems and so they suffer the brunt of globalization, the adverse effects of climate change, the inaccessibility of markets and other constraints. We are thus gathered today in special session to carry out a comprehensive review and appraisal of the Barbados Programme of Action, a programme designed to address a number of critical issues affecting small island developing States, and thereby help them rise to higher standards of living and well-being.

As a country that comprises over 17,000 islands, most of them sharing the development challenges and constraints that are weighing down the small island developing States, Indonesia fully supports the system-wide implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, the major outcome of the Global Conference in Bridgetown, Barbados in 1994. Moreover, we welcome the opportunity afforded by this comprehensive review to reflect on, assess and recommit ourselves to this valuable Programme and muster the will to move it forward.

The Commission on Sustainable Development, acting as a preparatory body to this special session, has done a great job of preparing the report before us. I am also pleased by the progress achieved during the informal consultations. My Government reaffirms its commitment to, and support for, the continued implementation of the Programme of Action. We hope that by reinvigorating the implementation of the Programme, we can disencumber small island developing States of the constraints that stand in the way of their sustained growth, sustainable development and attainment of higher standards of living.

To a considerable extent, the initial momentum of the implementation of the Programme of Action has been dissipated by the forces of globalization and trade liberalization as well as by the widespread acceptance of a development paradigm that favours the unrestrained play of market forces over multilateral cooperation. These have led to a decline in both bilateral and multilateral assistance to the small island developing States and to an erosion of their competitiveness in global trade.

In the case of the Pacific islands, there has been a sharp reduction of export revenues, as the purchasing power of their Asian trade partners has been rolled back by the financial crisis. In the preparatory talks last April, donors agreed, as they did five years ago in Barbados, that to carry out the Programme adequate, predictable, new and additional financial resources are needed. Yet the donor countries have not matched the efforts of the developing countries and continue to lag in fulfilling their commitments.

Moreover, given the rapid pace of globalization and their inadequate technology, small island developing States will find it even more difficult to attract investments and other financial flows.

Thus, a critical challenge facing us in the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action is the need to mobilize the financial resources to meet the priorities and responsibilities of the Programme, particularly in the areas of capacity-building, institution-building and the transfer of environmentally sound technologies. To sustain such an effort, there should be integrated planning in which a wide range of government agencies, civil society and other development actors must participate.

In international trade, the small island developing States face challenges made more formidable by the fact that, instead of helping them increase their competitiveness, the World Trade Organization has ruled against their entitlement to preferential treatment. This will constrict their already limited external earnings, exposing their vulnerable economies to greater risks. It is therefore crucial that the international community should help to strengthen the competitiveness of the small island developing countries and restore preferential treatment for them in the multilateral trading system. It is also essential that we effectively address the issue of their access to markets and the improvement of their competitiveness in global trade.

With regard to the transboundary movement of hazardous waste, we welcome the progress achieved during the informal consultations leading to an international mechanism involving all States and the relevant international organizations that will address these concerns in a specific and comprehensive manner.

In this era of globalization, there is no alternative to international cooperation and the promotion of equitable partnership for ensuring the successful implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Youssouf Ouédraogo, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Burkina Faso.

Mr. Ouédraogo (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): A few days ago, Hurricane Floyd, before hitting the United States, was devastating the Bahamas, severely battering the economy of that country and, what is worse, bringing death to many families. The scenes of desolation are still fresh in our memories.

I should thus like to take this opportunity to convey once again to all those who were affected our feelings of sympathy, compassion and solidarity.

That disaster served to remind us of the dangers and enormous difficulties facing island populations. Burkina Faso therefore welcomes the positive initiative taken by the United Nations to hold a special session on the specific problems faced by small island developing States. We are particularly gratified also because Burkina Faso, as a land-locked country that suffers from climatic hazards such as drought, desertification and unpredictable rainfall patterns, is in a very good position to understand what the hostility and perversity of nature can mean.

When the Barbados Programme of Action was adopted in 1994, it represented a solemn commitment by the international community to support the efforts of island States to ensure sustained growth and sustainable development in their countries, where merciless and even hostile forces of nature repeatedly give the lie to the most optimistic predictions.

Five years after the adoption of this Programme, what does the balance sheet show? First, we should reiterate the Programme's pertinence and validity, since the phenomena of globalization and trade liberalization corroborate its relevance, as does the holding of this special session of the General Assembly.

Secondly, it is important to stress that small island developing States have, despite many difficulties, fully shouldered their responsibilities at the national and regional levels. They have consistently elaborated initiatives to ensure the complete success of the Programme. This point has been made clear in statements we have heard at this session.

However, the international community must support these efforts in a more substantive and resolute manner. It is crucial in this respect to take into account all key sectors that require the implementation of urgent measures.

There are a number of critical areas where stringent action must be taken, without neglecting other issues. These include problems related to climate change, whose principal victims are often these States; natural and ecological disasters, as well as those due to climate variability; freshwater resources; coastal or marine resources, whose preservation is crucial; and problems relating to energy or to the promotion of sustainable tourism.

However, the future of the Programme of Action depends very much upon the capacity and, in particular, the will of the international community to provide the necessary financial resources for its implementation, in accordance with commitments undertaken in 1994 and reaffirmed at the special session devoted to the follow-up to the Rio Summit.

Burkina Faso hopes that, at the conclusion the current session, even though we cannot overcome the physical isolation of the small island developing States, we will be able to work together so that they have a greater sense of the solidarity of this community of nations, of which we are fully a part.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Jan Pronk, Minister for Environment of the Netherlands.

Mr. Pronk (Netherlands): Small island developing States differ from bigger countries and from developing countries that have direct connections with their neighbours over land. These differences are due to a peculiar geographical situation. They imply limits — limits to the scale of their economies and limits to the diversity of their communications. This results in a third limitation: an inherently one-sided production structure. Such considerations make them vulnerable to influences from outside. When we add to that their specific

vulnerability in ecological terms, it becomes clear that they are a special case.

This specific vulnerability of small island developing countries was first recognized by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and later acknowledged in Agenda 21 and the Barbados Programme of Action. The imports and exports of small island developing States are relatively expensive, due to their dependence on long-range transportation systems.

Besides being vulnerable economically, small island developing States are also vulnerable in ecological terms. Their coasts are often fragile. They are responsible for areas which are unique in terms of biological diversity. Because of their small size, their isolation and the fragility of island ecosystems, their biological diversity is among the most threatened in the world. In order to protect these precious assets, it is necessary to regulate or even prohibit the import or transboundary movement of hazardous and radioactive waste and materials.

Many small island developing States are vulnerable to threats related to climate change. Climate change is a global issue, but low-lying countries surrounded by seas will be the first to face consequences such as sea-level rise and extreme weather variability. Small island developing States need more time than richer countries to recover after being hit by hurricanes and floods. This means that it is necessary to help these countries to deal with the adverse effects of climate change, and also to support them in strengthening their own institutional capacity to prevent such consequences. Like other developing countries, small island developing States will have access to financial resources and other forms of assistance to be created under the Kyoto Protocol, in particular the clean development mechanism, which we hope will be operational soon. Small island developing States should therefore articulate their needs — not only their financial needs, but also those relating to their technological, institutional and analytical capacity — as clearly as possible through their national communications under the Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Over the past few years, many small island developing States have made considerable efforts to implement the Barbados Programme of Action. They have shown a strong sense of commitment to their sustainable development. They are trying to grasp the opportunities which they also have as a result of their special situation. Such opportunities are sustainable tourism, renewable sources of energy and access to marine resources. That is the way to go. The rest of the world community will have to support these efforts, in a true spirit both of solidarity and of common responsibility for the world ecosystem and for people in the vulnerable parts of the globe.

The Netherlands, together with Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles — two island economies within the Kingdom of the Netherlands — are committed to the sustainable development of all developing countries, including small islands. We give preference to multilateral cooperation. Assistance to small island developing States is to a great extent channelled through multilateral organizations. We do so not only to avoid overburdening limited institutional capacities, but also because we want to focus on common characteristics of developing countries, in particular in the environmental field.

There is a growing recognition that the preservation of our planet is a common responsibility. It will require good sustainable development policies which, first and foremost, are the responsibility of national Governments. However, they will have to be supported through international and regional cooperation. The Netherlands is prepared to continue to play its part.

The President: I now call on chairman of the delegation of Zimbabwe, Mr. Tichaona Jokonya.

Mr. Jokonya (Zimbabwe): As a developing country, Zimbabwe welcomes the convening of this special session of the General Assembly for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. The 1994 Conference in Barbados on the sustainable development of the small island developing States was the first taste of a global partnership that had been forged at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Developed and developing countries came together and agreed to cooperate to achieve sustainable development for small island States — development conditioned by their history and their social, cultural and economic strength; development that would meet their present needs without threatening the welfare of future generations by undermining the environment on which all life subsists.

The Barbados Programme called for national, regional and international action. The 14 priority areas outlined in that Programme of Action embraced sectorial concerns such as fresh water, climate change,

biodiversity, marine resources and tourism, as well as cross-cutting issues such as human resources development and the financing and support to put the plan into action.

The significant progress made at the national and regional levels by small island developing States testifies to both their claim of ownership of the Barbados Programme of Action and their acceptance of the primary responsibility for sustainable development. Over the past five years, small island States have undertaken domestic reforms in the area of macroeconomic policy to prepare themselves for integration into the global economy. At the regional level, they have realized that they can survive only if they act together in exploiting their natural resources. Each is too small to handle the sometimes completely new problems that arise from a world in which the economic order is rapidly changing. Strong partnerships have been developed in order to maximize available opportunities and to minimize the constraints that small States feel as individual actors.

Regrettably, for lack of the requisite complementary international support and facilitation, the sterling efforts of the small island States have not yielded maximal benefits. In the international community there has been dialogue without decision, and many decisions without action, leading to despair piled upon frustration. In fact, small island developing States are still threatened with marginalization in the emerging global economy owing to their continuing vulnerability, which remains largely unaddressed.

There is need for a new partnership to stimulate investment and job-creation in small island States, based on the sustainable management of their limited resources. This is particularly so in the sectors of renewable energy, sustainable tourism, agriculture and fisheries, coastal and marine resources, biodiversity resources, and freshwater resources. The international community should take supportive measures to foster an enabling environment for investment and external assistance. It should mobilize resources and financing; it should facilitate the transfer of environmentally sound technologies; and it should enhance capacity-building through education, training, awareness-raising and institutional development.

In the area of the environment, national efforts once again have not been matched by the requisite international support. Despite funding shortages, most small island nations have moved forward on environmental protection in line with the Barbados Programme of Action. Many have already devised national green plans and have set up sustainable development councils or agencies. To date, dozens of projects have been carried out nationally and regionally, although much remains to be done. Small island States should not be left alone to deal with their extreme vulnerability to storms, to the impact of El Niño phenomena and to other natural, but perilous, disasters.

With regard to trade, small island developing States, like many other developing countries, are threatened with an ever-tightening squeeze. Those States are threatened with the loss of the few trade preferences that minimally address their special circumstances and vulnerabilities.

The international community must realize that small island developing States rely more than most other countries on international trade, as their limited land mass and resources require that they import virtually everything, from energy to health supplies to machinery.

When the Barbados Programme of Action was adopted, Governments agreed that to carry out the Programme adequately, predictable new and additional financial resources will be needed. The international community has so far failed to fulfil its commitments regarding that agreement. As we enter the new millennium, let us hope that the international community will lift its sights, let its values pass beyond domestic frontiers, and come to the aid of small island States; indeed, we entreat it to do so. A positive, practical response from the developed countries would make possible the maximal utilization of the limited resources of the small island States. It would buttress their development efforts rather than frustrating them. They need not only a positive environment but also an international response that is not negative, but that is propitious for their efforts.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Abdus Samad Azad, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh.

Mr. Azad (Bangladesh): It is my great pleasure to participate in the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly, devoted to the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. As a least developed country, we identify ourselves with the Programme of Action. Eleven out of the 43 small island developing States are least developed countries, of which Bangladesh acts as coordinator.

The small island developing States have development needs similar to those of other developing

countries. They need human development, institutional capacity-building, development in the fields of health and education, social advancement, increase in per capita income, eradication of poverty and protection from natural and environmental threats. However, their difficulties are in many ways unique, and the approach to them too should be very special. Mostly for geographical reasons, small island developing States are more prone to natural and other forms of disaster. Many problems that small island developing States now face, or that are looming ahead of them, have a global dimension. No single State or even group of States can deal with such problems adequately. The threat of global warming and the consequent sea-level rise; the ravages of natural disasters ranging from cyclones to volcanic eruptions; the contamination of freshwater resources; and the rapid loss of biodiversity: these are some of the problems that need urgent attention and committed global action. In many cases, small islands suffer as a result of adverse conditions created by unsustainable activities to which they do not contribute.

Mr. Baali (Algeria), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Their particular geographical reality also makes small island States vulnerable to natural and other disasters. Their difficulties are compounded by economic constraints of smallness and remoteness. The small size of their domestic markets deprives them from the advantage of economies of scale. Inability to diversify — due partly to lack of commercial interest on the part of the private sector — is a particular difficulty that stands in the way of industrialization. In most cases, their specific physical circumstances make it difficult to benefit from global economic development. These circumstances require particular attention and special measures.

The needs of the small island developing States drew international recognition during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992, which resulted in the formulation and adoption of the Barbados Programme of Action two years later. Five years have elapsed since this formal international recognition was accorded and a blueprint drawn to meet the special requirements of the small island developing States. As we are looking into the implementation process, we note that much remains yet to be done.

In the meantime, the small island developing States themselves have made appreciable progress, particularly at the national level. They have forged partnerships and regional collaboration. In many instances, however, the international community has not been as forthcoming as envisaged on the scale promised. The aid flow is decreasing; preferential treatment to trade of many small island States is vanishing. This has thrown their vulnerable economies into particularly difficult circumstances for surviving the convulsive forces of globalization and liberalization.

We are particularly concerned that there has been a net decline in assistance to small island developing States, from $2.36 billion in 1994 to $1.96 billion in 1997. The Programme requires an increasing flow of resources for its implementation, not a diminution in resources. The Global Environment Facility should be made more responsive to their needs.

The particular circumstances of the small island developing States and the measures to address them have been agreed upon by the international community in the Barbados Programme of Action. The implementation has been assessed and recommendations made in the documents to be adopted by this special session. All of us need not only to renew our commitments here; now we must actually come forward with a determination to implement what we have already agreed on.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Ms. Akmaral Arystanbekova, chairperson of the delegation of Kazakhstan.

Ms. Arystanbekova (Kazakhstan): Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you on behalf of the delegation of the Republic of Kazakhstan on your election to the office of the President of the General Assembly at its twenty-second special session and to wish you and all the participants in the session successful and fruitful work.

The concept of sustainable development has gained broad international support since it was first introduced at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. At present, it is obvious that the world needs sustainable economic and social development based on strategic approaches to balanced and rational use of natural and water resources.

The Republic of Kazakhstan fully supports the principles and obligations with regard to sustainable development enshrined in the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21, the Declaration of Barbados and the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

We are convinced that in our interdependent world no problem can be addressed acting only on the basis of the interests of a single State or even of a region. The world today faces global problems which most countries cannot resolve on their own, and therefore the world community must come to their assistance.

We note with satisfaction that the international community is paying serious attention to the problems of sustainable development of the small island developing States, illustrated by the fact that this special session is entirely devoted to this subject.

As noted in the Programme of Action, the range of factors standing in the way of sustainable development of small island developing States is rather broad and includes small domestic markets, a narrow resource base, high costs for energy carriers, long distances from export markets, great vulnerability to natural disasters, and a fragile environment.

Our understanding of these problems and our support for their solution with the help of the international community are primarily based on the fact that Kazakhstan also faces most of these problems, first of all those related to ecology and the environment. It is a well-known fact that serious social and environmental problems in Kazakhstan are caused mainly by the drying up of the Aral Sea and the effects of many years of nuclear-weapons testing at the former testing ground near Semipalatinsk, inherited by my country. We also share with small island developing States the problems associated with long distances from export markets, since Kazakhstan experiences serious difficulties caused by the lack of access to international commercial routes, owing to its specific geographic location.

Of particular relevance to us as well as to small island developing States, in our opinion, is the practical implementation of initiatives related to more focused action at all levels, including the international level. The purpose is to strengthen support, including financial support, from all sources for small island developing States in order to facilitate their wider access to and transfer and use of environmentally sound technology, as set forth in the Programme of Action.

In this context, we fully share the idea put forward at the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, that the international community recognizes the specific difficulties of small island developing States and that the efforts of those States to achieve sustainable development should be given special support because of their small size, geographical remoteness, environmental instability and vulnerability with regard to climate changes and economic upheaval. In this connection, we welcome the initiatives to provide effective means, including new and additional financial resources, on the basis of the provisions of Agenda 21 to support small island developing States in their efforts to ensure sustainable development.

Kazakhstan highly appreciates the efforts of the international community to further implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and expresses its support for the decisions of the General Assembly at the current special session on this issue.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Mr. Kikwete (United Republic of Tanzania): At the outset allow me to express my delegation's sincere appreciation for the convening of this special session devoted to the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the small island developing States. I believe that the convening of such a meeting is important and necessary, as it will enable us take stock of the developments that have taken place in these countries since the Programme of Action was adopted in Bridgetown, Barbados, five years ago. In so doing we will also be able to establish the successes of the Programme, identify its limitations, seek solutions to these limitations and chart a new vision for the future of these States.

At a glance, the United Republic of Tanzania may not seem to be affected by the problems facing small island developing countries. But Tanzania is a developing nation like the small island States. Therefore, the issues being discussed and the challenges facing small island developing States are similar and relevant to the situation in Tanzania and in many of the developing countries.

There is also another factor. Tanzania is a union between the former Republic of Tanganyika and the former People's Republic of Zanzibar, which is a small island developing state. This fact also explains, in a significant way, why my delegation has a special interest in the discussion on this agenda item. Zanzibar is an island in the Indian Ocean. It occupies a total area of

1,250 square kilometres and has a population of about 800,000 people. The island of Zanzibar enjoys some autonomy in certain matters related to its economy, such as trade, investment and tourism. Like many small island developing States, Zanzibar's economy, until the 1970s, depended on trade in a single commodity — cloves — as the major source of foreign exchange. However, the fall in the price of cloves in the world market devastated the economy of Zanzibar. As a result, Zanzibar has now embarked on a programme aimed at diversifying its economy in order to expand its tourism and manufacturing industries and to attract foreign investment. In addition, Zanzibar is engaged effectively in finding solutions to problems related to the environment and development and those related to transit trade. In order for Zanzibar to succeed in these endeavours, however, the support of the international community is required. Hence the relevance and importance we attach to this debate.

My delegation recognizes the Barbados Programme of Action as the blueprint for the sustainable development of small island developing States. As delegations may recall, the Programme was adopted to assist these countries in pursuing programmes aimed at achieving sustainable development and economic growth, taking into consideration the countries' ecological and economic vulnerability. The Programme then identified 14 problem areas that need international cooperation to resolve. Six out of these — climate change, natural and environmental disasters, freshwater resources, coastal and marine resources, energy and tourism — have now been prioritized as needing to be urgently dealt with.

However, the small island developing States are now facing additional challenges arising from the twin process of globalization and trade liberalization. Because of the vulnerability of their economies, small island developing countries have continued to suffer from persistent marginalization in this new economic order.

My delegation notes with appreciation the positive developments of the last five years in some of the priority areas of concern to these countries. While considerable and strenuous efforts continue to be made by these States in implementing the Programme of Action, much more remains to be done. Lack of adequate financial resources stands out as a major problem in implementing the Programme of Action.

Official development assistance to small island developing States is on the decline, as it is for all developing countries. For example, in 1994 net disbursements for both bilateral and multilateral aid to these countries was $2,366,200,000. However, this figure had dropped to only $1,966,200,000 in 1997. Such a decline has a serious impact on these countries. Similarly, a low level of technology, inadequate private capital, low income and poor infrastructure have affected the smooth implementation of the Programme of Action.

My delegation calls upon the international donor community to reverse their decision and increase the level of their official development assistance to the small island developing countries. We also urge them to provide the necessary technical assistance and transfer the necessary technology to enable these countries to more effectively address their special socio-economic development constraints.

In the area of trade, my delegation would like to see the establishment of an equitable, secure, non-discriminating and predictable trading system that would enhance the trade development possibilities of the small island developing States and all developing countries in general. I hope that the third ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organization, to be held in Seattle in November of this year and the tenth United Nations Conference on Trade and Development meeting next year will exhaustively address these problems.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Ion Gorita, chairman of the delegation of Romania.

Mr. Gorita (Romania): The twenty-second special session of the General Assembly is the culmination of a thoroughgoing review of the Barbados Declaration and the Programme of Action. This process has served not only to renew commitments to the core principles, strategies and actions but to renew global attention to a whole wide range of problems concerning sustainable development in the small island developing States.

In this connection, our delegation wishes to express its appreciation for the work done by the Commission on Sustainable Development, acting as preparatory body for this special session under the leadership of Mr. Simon Upton, as well as by Ambassador Johne William Ash, acting as facilitator. The Romanian delegation appreciates the hard and focused work as well as the spirit of cooperation and compromise manifested in order to achieve what we hope will be a final consensus.

As was emphasized in the previous United Nations meetings regarding the small island developing States, the

international community has reiterated its recognition of the specific constraints faced by the small island developing States due to their small size, vulnerability to climate change and ecological fragility, as well as their need for special support in their efforts to achieve sustainable development.

Taking into consideration these global concerns, our delegation welcomes the identification of further areas of priority action, such as climate change — including climate variability — and sea-level rise, natural disasters, freshwater resources, coastal and marine resources, energy and tourism, as well as the means for their implementation, which were debated at the seventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development last April. With the political support of the international community and the financial support of donor countries, the positive achievements in all the newly emphasized frameworks for action will contribute in a broad sense to the success of the process of sustainable development.

Speaking of the success of sustainable development in small island developing States, the Romania delegations deems it necessary for the general effort to focus on two main areas of action, which in fact represent the greatest challenges at the beginning of the new millennium.

First is the question of globalization. Since the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States took place in Barbados in 1994, the pace of globalization and trade liberalization has affected the small and medium-sized economies, especially the economies of small island developing countries, by presenting new problems and opportunities and, through this, increasing the need for further action concerning the implementation of the Programme of Action.

The process of globalization has produced significant asymmetries between the developing and the developed countries and contributed to a further widening of the income gap between them. Moreover, it has led to the marginalization of a number of developing countries, particularly the least developed countries and those with small economies. As a result of this challenge, external factors have become critical in determining the success or failure of small island developing States in their domestic efforts.

In order to avoid ongoing marginalization in the emerging international economic framework in the areas of trade, investments, commodities and capital markets, the small island developing States should undertake internal reforms to facilitate their integration into the global economy. A complementary factor of this endeavour should be regional cooperation. A coordinated policy of regional and subregional economic, social and environmental approaches in the field of sustainable development would contribute towards maximizing the opportunities that result from the process of globalization.

Second is the big issue of poverty. Poverty remains a major problem affecting the capacities of developing countries to achieve sustainable development. The international community, including the United Nations, has an important role to play in assisting and supporting national Governments through advocacy, capacity-building and the establishment of internationally agreed targets. The persistence of poverty has compromised the ability of countries to achieve basic social services, such as basic education, health care, nutrition and sanitation.

The eradication of poverty should therefore represent a central theme and an objective of high priority for small island developing States.

In addition, it is necessary to underline the important contribution of official development assistance. The declining level of official development assistance in recent years has affected the quality of aid programmes in reducing poverty.

In conclusion, I would like to express the support of my delegation for the content of the documents which will be adopted at this special session and to recognize that the present high-level event will provide a good opportunity for all countries to reaffirm commitments enshrined in the Barbados Programme of Action.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Fawzi Bin Abdul Majeed Shobokshi, Chairman of the delegation of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Shobokshi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Mr. Gurirab on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its twenty-second special session for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. We are confident that under his leadership and with the efficient teamwork of the Bureau, the General Assembly will achieve the desired objectives of this session.

I am pleased to welcome and congratulate the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the

Kingdom of Tonga on their admission to the membership of the United Nations. We look forward to their contribution to the effectiveness of the United Nations and the noble goals which it was established to achieve.

The policy and approach of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the field of development and the environment is anchored in the tolerant principles of the Islamic religion and the *sharia*, the Islamic body of laws and traditions that make the stewardship of our planet the main task of man, who was honoured by God's blessings in this charge. On this premise, the policy emphasizes the exploitation of natural and environmental resources to satisfy the current needs of the Saudi people without jeopardizing the capabilities and potential of future generations or their right to benefit from those resources in the long term.

Attention to the issues of sustainable development with a view to protecting the environment is a primary concern of the Government of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques in its national, regional and international activities. The basic laws of governance stipulate in article 32 that the Government should endeavour to preserve, protect and develop the environment and prevent its pollution. This policy is evident in the strategy of the Seventh Development Plan (2000-2004), which emphasizes protection of the environment and the preservation of natural resources as strategic objectives of this plan. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is one of the founding countries of the regional organization for the protection of the marine environment and the regional authority for the protection of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. It ratified the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. It also ratified the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is aware of the difficulties that face the small island States in their economic and social development and their need for assistance to overcome the obstacles to their sustainable development, which include topographic and geographic conditions, as well as climatic conditions that result in strong winds and devastating floods that destroy essential parts of their infrastructure. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is also aware of the special relationship between the small island States and the marine environment and the dependence of many of their economic activities on the seas and oceans. Thus, we fully understand the concern of those States to protect their marine environment.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which shares the concerns of the international community about climate change and is striving to achieve its own sustainable development, has, in addressing those issues and in its utilization of the seas and oceans, persistently taken into account the need to protect the marine environment in all its projects, including safe drilling, transportation of petroleum and its derivatives and its distribution throughout the world. To that end, Saudi Arabia utilizes the most advanced technologies, regardless of the additional expenses involved, in order to satisfy international standards and laws with respect to the preservation of the marine environment.

Moreover, Saudi Arabia, which is a developing country, is among the biggest donor countries in terms of allocation of assistance and grants. The total amount of Saudi aid reached more than $72 billion, or 5.5 per cent of its gross national product, and 73 countries benefited from that assistance.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is cognizant of the importance of oil and the needs of small and large countries, developed as well as developing, for this strategic material for their economic development and social progress. Thus we have endeavoured to develop indicators that clarify the potential dangers of global warming for human beings and the environment and the impact thereof on the seas and oceans and on the sustainable development of small island States, as outlined in article 1 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

We must draw attention to article 3 of this Convention, which emphasizes the need of the States parties to the Convention to fulfil their commitments to the Berlin formula during the current negotiations aimed at reaching a legal formula to strengthen the obligations of the industrial countries in Annex I of the Convention. This means that no new obligations should be imposed on developing countries. This should also exclude the introduction of new ideas that are not included in the Berlin formula, such as the joint application or exchange of emissions internationally, and other ideas which result, in the final analysis, in burdening the developing countries with the task of reducing the emission of gases. Of special importance is the fact that most of the countries in Annex I of the Convention did not fulfil their current obligations of conforming to their emission levels of 1990 by the year 2000 or of fulfilling their financial and technological obligations under the Convention.

The parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change should take into consideration that the developing countries — and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is one them — depend to a large extent on the production and export of fossil fuels. Thus it is illogical to impose additional taxes on petroleum, which is already overburdened by high taxes from the industrial countries, whereas coal and nuclear energy receive high levels of subsidies and tax incentives. Common sense and fairness dictate the need for removing such subsidies entirely and for imposing taxes on these resources commensurate with the high level of pollution resulting from them — for example, at a rate equal to taxes imposed on petroleum. Here we must recall that the total taxes to be imposed on petroleum are estimated at about 15 times the volume of collective assistance given by industrialized countries as a whole to the developing countries.

Furthermore, it is difficult to accept the fact that industrial countries continue to increase and encourage high levels of production of fossil fuels, particularly oil, in all regions outside the developing countries, while at the same time they take measures to limit global consumption. The final result of this obvious contradiction is an inevitable decline in the oil exports of developing countries. This is harmful to their national incomes, which rely heavily on oil exports.

In conclusion, let me assure you that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will always to refrain from harming the environment in any way. Our environmental policy will always be pursued in the context of our sustainable development efforts.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Alfonso Ortega Urbina, chairman of the delegation of Nicaragua.

Mr. Ortega Urbina (Nicaragua)(*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, allow me first to congratulate you on your well- deserved election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this special session.

Our country is particularly interested in sustainable development in general and, of course, in that of the small island developing States, among which are Caribbean countries with which we share ties of friendship and brotherhood. These relations encourage us to follow closely everything related to the sustainable development of small island developing States. In that regard, Nicaragua co-sponsored the draft resolution entitled "Recognition of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development", which we hope will be approved by consensus.

Nicaragua supports the Barbados Programme of Action and we understand that things have not remained at a stand till. To our knowledge, progress has been made in implementing the ideas raised in 1994 during the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. Since then the merits have been shared by small island developing States themselves and by various agencies of the United Nations system, international economic and financial organizations and the international community in general interested in assisting in implementing the complex yet ultimately attainable goals of the Barbados Programme of Action. Undoubtedly, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the problems that make up the main difficulties of these island States have two sources: first, problems that have their origins in natural phenomena, and secondly, those that are related to socio-economic circumstances. In any case, both types of problems are interrelated due to their interactions, and the effects of both types of calamities have a common victim: the inhabitants of the islands.

Our country, which in different ways and at different times has been a victim of nature's fury and inclemency, cannot help but think about all the different threats that face the people of island nations, who are exposed to greater vulnerability compared to people who live on the continents. In the last two or three years, the El Niño phenomenon has made itself felt with greater intensity in different parts of our planet, in which the small islands have definitely been affected. All the effects that stem from climatic change and from phenomena that have affected the normal sea levels, as well as other types of tectonic and other dangers, seriously imperil this part of mankind.

The picture becomes even bleaker if we observe that along with natural problems, at the same time we see socio-economic difficulties. In this respect, unemployment levels, inadequate infrastructure, agricultural and industrial development, the external debt problem, population explosion in many cases, problems within educational programmes and structures — not to mention the possible adverse effects that can arise from the process of economic globalization — strengthen the chain of poverty that binds thousands of inhabitants within these island States.

Proper attention to the most dominant sectors — such as energy, tourism, marine and coastal resources,

the prevention and mitigation of the effects of natural disasters, ensuring reliable and permanent sources of drinking water and adequate sanitation systems — constitutes one of the foundations necessary in order to take decisive steps in this difficult process. However, we cannot overlook the fact that as well as dealing with these sectors, we must continue building and strengthening the overall national ability of every island State to continue to achieve greater autonomy in order to maintain this progress and thus sustain development.

It is natural that there be concern about situations and processes that are difficult to resolve, but, at the same time, it is encouraging to see that the main actors involved in this matter, the small island developing States, have shown considerable enthusiasm and action at both the national and regional levels in gradually resolving these matters. No less important has been the clear indication from the donor community and many other international bodies of interest and determination in cooperating decisively in this matter.

Here it is worth mentioning the results of two events that took place earlier this year which signalled important progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action. We are referring primarily to the Saint Lucia conference on the small island developing States, sponsored by the World Bank and the Commonwealth Secretariat. That event, which devoted part of its time to studying the effects of globalization on the economies of small island States, showed even more clearly the difficulties which that phenomenon adds to the already existing ones.

Secondly, we would refer to the round table which took place between small island States and the donor community here at the United Nations. It led to a frank and productive conversation among the participants on the main problems facing the small island States and revealed renewed interest on the part of many donors towards these nations.

Through all that I have said, we request the international community, in particular the United Nations and financial institutions, to be aware of these situations and to redouble their efforts in favour of this noble cause.

The Acting President: I now call on Mr. Gert Rosenthal, chairman of the delegation of Guatemala.

Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala)(*spoke in Spanish*): We are participating in the discussion of this special session for various reasons, some of which are linked to a feeling of solidarity with small island developing States and, in particular, with our brothers and neighbours of the Caribbean. Other reasons we must admit, are out of self-interest, since on our northern coast we share the same sea with those neighbours. Hence, many of the problems facing island States are ours, too.

Similarly, we have many traits in common with Caribbean countries: production patterns, natural resources, vulnerability to natural phenomena and the vagaries of the international economy, as well as in our overdependence on a few basic export commodities. Lastly, we fully identify with Agenda 21, which legitimized the idea that small island States have unique problems when it comes to tackling their development.

I would like to refer to a few aspects that we feel are of particular significance. First, I will mention climate change, at the global level and the way in which it affects our individual countries. The catastrophe that struck Central America last year — hurricane Mitch — is still fresh in our memory and serves as an eloquent example of how 25 years of development efforts can be erased in 24 hours by the fury of nature. We have to take action at the level of the community of nations to counter the trends towards global warming, which aggravate the phenomena such as the one I mentioned, or that of El Niño last year. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol have taken steps in the right direction.

It is important that the countries mentioned in Annex I of this Protocol thoroughly fulfil their commitments to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. It is equally important that the planet's ability to fix these emissions be enhanced. My country in particular is willing to contribute to this goal. Although the mechanism of emissions certificates should not be seen as a license for developed countries to go on emitting pollutants, we do feel that it is a useful tool, albeit it a transitory one, until we make progress in developing technologies that pollute less or not at all. In this context, we would like to repeat our support for the clean development mechanism.

Individually, our countries have to continue improving their ability to prevent natural disasters. Among the measures that we have already adopted are early warning systems, infrastructure to protect hydrographic basins and coastal areas and emergency early response systems. This is another area of cooperation among our countries. In this respect, we should point out the cooperation agreement in the area of

natural disasters that we signed last April within the framework of the Association of Caribbean States.

A second priority for us is energy. Overdependency on hydrocarbons is another vulnerability factor for both small island States and Central American countries; it is both an economic and an environmental vulnerability. For an extended period of time in the current decade, the relatively low prices for oil in international markets seemed to dampen the sense of urgency with respect to that dependency. However, higher prices in the last few months have once again made this matter a priority.

Thirdly, we share with small island States the concern over maritime transport of contaminated, hazardous or nuclear wastes. We urge all nations to comply with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and with the Basel Convention.

Fourthly, we acknowledge that additional funding, from both domestic and international sources, is required in tackling some of these matters.

Finally, we find merit in moving away from traditional comparative measurement indices in order to include a component within measurement criteria that measures the level of vulnerability. Although we understand the methodological and practical challenges of such an undertaking, we recognize the usefulness of having something which comes close to a vulnerability index, to which the draft declaration that we have before us refers.

There are other important matters on our agenda. I referred only to those which, for one reason or another, deserve our particular attention. The main point that I would like to highlight is our support for the full implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action.

The Acting President: I now call on Mr. Alounkeo Kittikhoun, chairman of the delegation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): At the outset, allow me, on behalf of the Group of Land-locked Developing Countries, to congratulate the President on his assumption of the presidency at this special session. We are confident that with his well-known skills and abilities he will steer the session to a successful conclusion.

In 1992, on the recommendation of the Earth Summit, the United Nations Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States was convened in Barbados by the General Assembly. In a good illustration of global partnership, the developed and developing countries agreed to work together for sustainable development, development that would meet present needs without jeopardizing the welfare of future generations by undermining the environment on which all life depends.

The Barbados Programme of Action outlined 14 priority areas for national, regional and international action, areas which range from sectoral concerns — such as freshwater, climate change, biodiversity, marine resources and tourism — to cross-cutting issues, namely development of human resources and the financing and support needed to put the plan into action.

We meet today in a special session in order to review the progress in the implementation of the Barbados plan and to see how the international community can give a further push to action in support of small island developing nations.

Over recent years the small island developing States have undertaken domestic reforms in the area of macroeconomic policy to facilitate integration into the global economy. Arrangements have also been made at the regional level to maximize opportunities available to them and to minimize the constraints that they face. Despite tremendous efforts, the situation has not improved much. The small island developing States are very much concerned that their disadvantaged situation will result in their marginalization in the emerging global economic order in the areas of trade, investment, commodities and capital markets.

In light of the above, while it is up to small island developing States to pursue sustainable development, the world community should take further measures to support this group of countries, especially in the following areas: promotion of an enabling environment for investment and external assistance; resource mobilization and financing; transfer of environmentally sound technologies; and capacity-building, including education, training, awareness-raising and institutional development. With cooperation, support and assistance from the international community, the small island developing States could find effective means to build a more secure future.

The land-locked developing countries, on whose behalf I have the honour to speak today, have great sympathy for the small island developing States. Our two

groups of countries are both vulnerable and fragile. We, the land-locked developing countries, mostly suffer from the lack of territorial access to the sea, aggravated by remoteness and isolation from world markets and by the prohibitive transport costs associated with conditions of inadequate infrastructure, imbalance of trade, inefficient transport organization, poor utilization of assets and weak managerial, procedural, regulatory and institutional systems, while the small island developing States have their own peculiar vulnerabilities and characteristics which make the difficulties that they face complex and severe. In order for the two groups to succeed in their endeavours, partnership between them and the world community should be strengthened. It is our belief that only through this strengthened partnership with the world community will these two groups of countries, the land-locked developing countries and the small island developing States be able to accomplish the huge tasks that lie ahead. In this spirit, I would like to wish the special session great success.

The Acting President: I now call on Mr. Naste Čalovski, chairman of the delegation of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Mr. Calovski (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): Let me first express the great satisfaction of my delegation at seeing an eminent representative of Namibia presiding over this important special session of the General Assembly devoted to the review of the Programme of Action for Small Island Developing States. The President will, of course, have our full support and cooperation in his effort to reach a successful outcome of this session.

The Republic of Macedonia is a land-locked country. Our economy is an economy in transition. We have an advanced democratic political system; we are a country ruled by law and we have a market economy. But being land-locked and in the region of the Balkans we face specific problems which are affecting our development. That is why we have profound understanding of the specific problems of the small island States, and that is why we have stressed at every opportunity what I will call the obligation of the international community, in particular developed countries, to take effective actions to enable these States to have sustainable development and to overcome the specific problems they face.

The Commission on Sustainable Development, of which my country is a member, acting as the preparatory body for this special session for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, has submitted a report containing proposals for action by the Assembly. They are interesting and they are substantive, and I am sure the Assembly will adopt them. The international community should focus on their implementation, on investing in their implementation. The implementation should be seen as a profitable undertaking by both the Governments and the private sector.

What is wrong with providing assistance to and investing in small island States so that they can achieve sustainable development? Nothing, of course; we can all gain from that. To achieve sustainable development they should be helped to strengthen their capacity through the mobilization of local and foreign resources.

In the present period of globalization, taking into account the vulnerability of the small island States, regional and global actions are very important and necessary in the effort to prevent their marginalization. The international community and the United Nations in particular have special responsibility in this respect. The marginalization of these States should be seen as a global problem which should be resolutely prevented. To achieve results in this effort, international cooperation is a must.

In addition to the negative effects of the global economy and international trade on the small island States, there are other global problems that could negatively affect their future. One of them is climate change. The fear that some of these States will be flooded is real, and in this aspect the developed countries have special responsibility. Other special problems are their dependence on finished products, profiting from the transfer of technology, their isolation and so on.

In our view there are answers to all these problems. If the will exists, the special problems can be solved and the concerns of these States can be addressed. The Republic of Macedonia would like to see the States of paradise flourish in all aspects of their development.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on the chairman of the delegation of Colombia.

Mr. Valdivieso (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Government of Colombia is here at the General Assembly with the firm intention of renewing the commitments established in the Barbados Programme of Action. We note with interest the progress made in the

implementation of this ambitious Programme, but we are also concerned about the enormous work we still have ahead.

In the last five years, the challenges imposed by an ever more globalized economy on developing countries have increased, particularly for the small island developing States. Climactic phenomena have intensified, causing natural disasters of devastating proportions; marine pollution has increased; and the pressures exerted on our coastal and marine resources have intensified.

My country has traditionally given high priority to the issues related to our neighbours in the Caribbean region. An important part of our territory is Caribbean. We have established dynamic relations with the countries of this region with regard to cooperation and collaboration in various fields, and we have actively participated in the integration process known as the Association of Caribbean States process, which was initiated five years ago in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia.

In this framework of Caribbean integration, I would like to highlight the initiative for the creation of a Caribbean sustainable tourism zone and its plan of action, which will undoubtedly benefit the Caribbean countries that depend to a large extent on the tourism sector. I would also like to underscore the Colombian proposal made at the Association of Caribbean States for the establishment of a Caribbean preferential tariff. The promotion of international trade as the engine of economic growth is and will continue to be a priority on the agenda of the countries of the Caribbean Basin.

Furthermore, Colombia supports the initiative on declaring the Caribbean Sea a special area in the context of sustainable development. As depositary country and part of the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the wider Caribbean Region, we believe that special treatment is necessary to address the particular needs of the Caribbean Sea. We urge the Assembly to support this initiative.

The Government of Colombia considers the following aspects to be of major importance to the further implementation of the Barbados Program of Action.

The first is financial resources. The Barbados Programme of Action must have the appropriate financial resources to fulfil its objectives. Any initiative, project or programme in areas that call for urgent action can be viable only if adequate resources are available to put it into effect. In this context, we call on the donor countries, the United Nations agencies and on the international financial institutions in general to contribute resolutely to these goals.

The second aspect is human resources, knowledge and information. The negative effects of natural and environmental disasters and climate change can be mitigated, diminished and prevented only by improving knowledge of the different natural and atmospheric phenomena. It is therefore essential to deploy all international efforts to better the understanding of these phenomena to enable us to predict them and to take timely action against their threats.

The third aspect is technology transfer and capacity-building. The transfer and use of ecologically sound technologies is essential to achieve sustainable development, as is the strengthening of institutional capacity. Therefore, in addition to the efforts made to mobilize resources, it is also necessary to strengthen international cooperation in this area.

The fourth aspect is the vulnerability index. The definition of environmental and socio-economic parameters to measure the vulnerability of small island States should reflect the individual characteristics of each of those States. In this regard, it will be important to establish vulnerability by using accurate and reliable data that represent the actual situations of small island States.

In closing, Colombia would like to add its support to the repeated calls made by developing countries — and on this particular occasion by the small island developing States — that the human face of globalization that has been so frequently mentioned in this Hall become a concrete goal. Sustainable development urgently calls for the alleviation of poverty, and it is our duty to contribute resolutely to achieve that goal.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Baboucari-Blaise Ismaila Jagne, chairman of the delegation of the Gambia.

Mr. Jagne (Gambia): The importance of this special session on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States cannot be over-emphasized. We in the Gambia have a lot in common with small island developing States, but the most salient feature of almost all small States is vulnerability. It is gratifying to note, though, that in each

of the priority areas identified in the Programme of Action, some progress has been made, although a lot remains to be done. But we can all agree that all efforts geared towards sustainable development, whether at the national or regional levels, are constrained by limited resources.

It is an established fact that official development assistance has declined considerably. One would have thought that foreign direct investment would increase to support the national structural adjustment programmes and economic restructuring. So far, no compensatory mechanisms have been envisaged for the countries undertaking such painful reforms. And as if all of this were not enough trouble already, in this era of globalization and liberalization the predicament of small States appears to have been overlooked.

Lack of financial and human capital endowment deny us the necessary leverage required to take advantage of the opportunities created by the phenomenon of globalization. Furthermore, market access for our exports is a major problem, resulting in unfavourable prices and ultimately deepening our dependence on balance of payments support. It is a vicious circle.

Finally, let me quote a wise saying: "Small is beautiful." Yes, small is beautiful, but it can also be painful. Let us therefore redouble our efforts so that the pain does not rob us of the beauty of being small.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Ismail Shafeeu, Minister of Home Affairs, Housing and Environment of the Maldives.

Mr. Shafeeu (Maldives): The President of the Republic of Maldives, Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, was to address this special session of the General Assembly. However, due to pressing engagements, the President was unable to be present at this session. I therefore have been instructed to read out the text of the speech that he had intended to deliver to the Assembly.

> "It is said that expectation often fails worst where it promises most. That indeed is the case with the Barbados Programme of Action and the hopes of the small island developing States.
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> "The small island developing States left Barbados five years ago with a sense of satisfaction and expectation. The Programme of Action agreed at that meeting was a blueprint for the sustainable development of small island developing States. Its implementation would have addressed many of the challenges facing us in achieving sustainable development.
>
> "Naturally, we banked much on the promises made. But today, we cannot conceal our disappointment. Extensive efforts have been made by the small island developing States to fulfil their own commitments. The Alliance of Small Island States has been lobbying hard to keep the international commitments alive. But nothing much has been done by the developed world.
>
> "In fact, on many fronts there has been a clear regression. Development assistance to small States has seen a painful decline, and the critical needs of small island developing States in the area of capacity-building have not bee provided for. The transfer of existing technologies to the small island developing States and the development of new ones appropriate for small States have been ignored.
>
> "The important role assigned to the United Nations system and multilateral agencies has not been fulfilled, and the donors' conference held in February this year has produced almost no results. Meanwhile, environmental degradation has continued unabated, and the Kyoto Protocol, modest though it is, still remains without effect. And time is fast running out.
>
> "Already the world is facing the consequences of climate change. The recent El Niño phenomenon was perhaps the worst this century, causing widespread damage to national economies and ecosystems. The worst ever worldwide coral bleaching episode was recorded in its wake. In some places, entire reef systems died. Cyclones and extreme weather events wreaked havoc. Millions of people were affected, and the damage ran into the billions of dollars.
>
> "In the Maldives, there is widespread beach erosion. Salt-water intrusion is affecting the viability of settlements on many islands. As our economy is based entirely on the well-being of the natural habitat, we are gravely threatened by the effects of environmental deterioration. The Maldives is doing what it can to protect its people. We are pursuing sustainable practices in our economic activities. Measures are being taken to protect and conserve

the biological diversity of the country, and other small island States are doing the same. But all these efforts will be futile without effective international action.

"As an immediate step, the Kyoto Protocol needs to be rescued. A substantial reduction of greenhouse-gas emissions by all countries has to be achieved. Already the global climate system has been subjected to dangerous levels of interference from human activity, and the future of small island developing States has become more threatened than ever before. Therefore, meeting the costs of adaptation for those States should be an immediate priority. Mitigating the adverse impacts of climate change should be given special attention, and new and additional financing for sustainable development must be provided.

"As custodians of large tracts of the world's oceans, the small States should be supported in the conservation and management of coastal and marine resources. All unsustainable practices in exploiting natural resources must be stopped. Indeed, all the commitments of the international community in the Barbados Programme of Action must be honoured, for our very survival is at stake.

"Despite these self-evident truths, the world is becoming less and less responsive to the needs of small island developing States. This poses serious problems for the least developed among them. Many, including my own country, face graduation from the United Nations list of least developed countries. The current procedures used for assessing development status ignore the inherent limitations of small economies. Graduation could very well reverse the gains that they have so far been achieved.

"Globalization provides new challenges for small island States. They should not be left behind in the emerging global marketplace. Special measures need to be undertaken to ensure the integration of these countries into the world economy.

"As we enter a new century and millennium, we must ensure a sustainable future for planet Earth. Anything less will be short-sighted and will invite disaster. The rich nations and financial institutions must recognize that sustainability is not a poor relation of development. Indeed, it is the only viable long-term development option.

"Despite the complacency of the international community to date, all opportunities for rescuing future generations are not yet lost. Let us not squander any more. Providing financial and technical support for the sustainable development of small States is not a Herculean task.

"But the costs of failure are unthinkable. Indeed, if the unthinkable does happen, the small States of the world could have a plain and cruel epitaph: 'Never have so many communities suffered so much for want of so little'."

Before I conclude, allow me also to take this opportunity to welcome and congratulate the three new Members of the United Nations, the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga. My delegation looks forward to working closely with these three small island nations to promote the cause of small island developing States.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Kataaotika Tekee, Minister of Environment and Social Development of Kiribati.

Mr. Tekee (Kiribati): Kiribati is most privileged to have been invited to participate in this very important session of the General Assembly and to make a statement. We acknowledge also and thank the countries that have expressed words of welcome to us as a new Member of the United Nations.

It has been only a little more than five years since the Barbados Programme of Action was adopted, and it is indeed timely at this point to review and evaluate the progress made in the implementation of the intentions and activities expressed and decided on at that time.

My Government accords great importance to this session, and it is for that reason that we have made the effort to participate. Moreover, we hope to learn from the process what decisions will be taken to facilitate and promote true partnership in development and strategies and programmes in support of a sustainable future for small island States.

Small island States are diverse in their geophysical environments. There are high volcanic islands, and there are low-lying atolls. But they are equally constrained in their options for sustainable development by their small size, limited natural and human resource bases and institutional restrictions, to name but a few

considerations. Moreover, they are very vulnerable to the adverse impact of world economic problems and world climate change. In Kiribati we are only too aware of the likely future of the atolls, given the consequences of climate change and sea-level rise. In that sense, the degree of success of small islands in pursuing sustainable development objectives could be used to monitor the state of the global environment. We have always maintained that small islands are in the front line with regard to the adverse impact of climate change and sea-level rise.

Kiribati is making great efforts to create conditions facilitate development programming along the paths of sustainable development. We are enacting framework environmental legislation to regulate and control the impact of development projects on our fragile ecosystems and to limit and control the level of pollution in the environment from many sources and activities. However, further work is required to implement the legislation and to develop and legislate for standards and for management and enforcement mechanisms. Capacity-building is required in these areas.

We are only too aware of the need to provide a healthier environment for our urban population. To this end, the Government has obtained a loan from the Asian Development Bank for improving water supplies and sanitation facilities in South Tarawa. We are strengthening the environmental management division of the Ministry of Environment and Social Development by increasing its establishment complements. We are participating in regional and global efforts to address the problems related to ozone depletion, climate change, loss of biodiversity and ocean pollution. Our participation is based on the realization that global environmental problems are the common concern of all peoples and that through a cooperative response they can be resolved. This is indeed our hope.

Efforts are also being made to facilitate in-country work, which is being carried out to gain a better understanding of our environment and, consequently, of our vulnerability to climate change, sea-level rise and other human-induced phenomena. We need to inform ourselves about the realities of the national situation and about likely trends in the state of the global environment, so that we can develop realistic options for policies and strategic planning that ensure development on a sustainable basis.

While we are making efforts to participate in all of these worthwhile regional and international programmes, we clearly recognize that we lack trained manpower, skills, technological know-how, useful tools for analysis and some critical data. Given this situation, we have a sense that we may fail to recognize some options for sustainable development programmes. Traditional knowledge plays an important role as a base on which to build a better appreciation of the more complex scientific approach to understanding the local environment. This is important if we are also to recognize the interaction of development and the environment. Traditional knowledge should also be readily associated with the idea of the interrelatedness of the components of the environment.

Capacity-building — in terms of manpower and institutions — and public consciousness-raising to ensure participation in decision-making processes and the implementation of programmes are required if we are to fulfil the commitments undertaken under the Barbados Programme of Action.

Let me now refer to some specific components. Options for responding to climate change include the effective management of the coastal zone, supported by appropriate tools and data, the efficient generation and use of energy sources and appropriate technologies. Coastal-zone management should be integrated with land-use planning. Kiribati is vulnerable to extreme events such as storm surges and tsunamis. Some land has experienced inundation, and the full documentation and systematic collection of information on such events would assist us to better understand the climate system and vulnerability of the atolls. We will highlight our needs in these areas.

The problems associated with the disposal of waste are recognized as a serious constraint on sustainable development, particularly in urban areas. In such areas waste is visible, and downstream effects include contamination of limited groundwater lenses in highly populated and industrial areas and unhealthy inshore waters. Opportunities to recycle greater varieties of waste need to be investigated and investment in those areas facilitated. Kiribati will benefit from existing technologies for the treatment, disposal and management of waste and for the rehabilitation of contaminated groundwater lenses. A system is required for the management and control of ocean pollution from ships and land-based sources, together with the necessary tools and information.

Coastal and marine resources are key components of the life support systems of small islands, especially atolls. These include living and non-living resources. They are elements of a coastal-zone integrated management plan,

and I have referred to our needs in that area. But until we gain experience in developing and implementing such a plan, we will not be able to anticipate gaps, so the plan must be supplemented by other appropriate programmes under the coastal and marine resources component of the Barbados Programme of Action.

We support ongoing initiatives to better manage the marine resources at the national, regional and global levels. The interests of small islands as owners of the resources within their exclusive economic zones have long been ignored, and a more equitable share of the revenue from catches by distant water fishing nations would be justified.

The limited and easily polluted groundwater supplies in Kiribati atolls are among the major constraints on sustainable development. Technologies and infrastructures for increasing rainwater collection, rehabilitating polluted groundwater lenses, protecting water supplies and upgrading reticulated water supplies in urban areas are required. Effective water management plans are also desired.

The inadequacy of our water supplies exacerbates water shortages during any long period without rain. Desalination plants are essential. Land is very limited and there is increasing competition for its use for human settlement, infrastructure and public services. Traditional ownership encourages the right of individuals to use their land the way they wish. This causes constraints on land use on a sustainable basis. For urban areas in particular, fiscal planning, technological tools and capacity-building are also required. Data on the physical and topological characteristics of the atoll and a public-awareness programme to solicit community support and participation in fiscal planning measures are to be desired.

The dependency of Kiribati on fossil fuels for development will continue. However, we are also conscious of the need to do what we can to mitigate climate change. Energy sources, the type of technologies employed and energy use should all be efficient. There should be a greater effort at research into the development of more efficient and environmentally friendly technologies, including simple technologies appropriate for use in atolls. It is also necessary to devise mechanisms to attract investment in these areas.

The status of biodiversity and biological resources needs to be assessed. Research should be carried out on the genetic makeup of certain species that have value in traditional medicine. Conservation and management programmes should be promoted to protect species that are at risk and to enhance the functioning of the ecosystem.

My Government acknowledges the assistance that developed and developing countries have provided in our effort to pursue sustainable development goals. We stress here that capacity-building is very important. This can be enhanced through the training of nationals, public awareness-raising programmes, greater cooperation among all stakeholders, both in-country and across the region, and a better flow and exchange of information and understanding on the global, regional and national levels. We need also to foster the better use of technological and scientific information in policy and programme development and implementation.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I call now on Mr. Jacques Louis Boisson, Chairman of the delegation of Monaco, who will speak on behalf of the group of French-speaking countries.

Mr. Boisson (Monaco) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to address the Assembly on behalf of the group of French-speaking countries. Those countries welcome the convening of the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly, devoted to the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

Small island developing States are facing complex, difficult and very often specific problems. They have weaknesses and limitations because of their small size, their geographic isolation, their ecological fragility and their vulnerability to climate change. This specificity, which is acknowledged in Agenda 21 and duly reflected in the Barbados Programme of Action, greatly influences the development of their infrastructures and the effectiveness and cost of communications and transport. Their resources are not generally diverse, which forces them into economically unfavourable specialization and which prevents them from taking advantage of the economies of scale. They are excessively dependent on international trade. This has caused an abnormal degree of vulnerability, which for most of them has increased as a result of globalization and the liberalization of markets.

In general, these countries are not resistant to economic shocks generated beyond their shores, such as those caused by fluctuations in commodity prices. Due account must be taken of the negative effects of world

trade liberalization on the sustainable development of small island developing States. Some such States are subject to powerful demographic pressures; many possess meagre renewable freshwater resources. Many of them possess considerable natural resources, in particular diverse species of animals and plants which are threatened with extinction.

The process launched at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held at Rio de Janeiro, was aimed at promoting a world partnership to help preserve the Earth for future generations. Small island States are making an important contribution to global sustainability in many major areas. In addition to their biodiversity, their coral reef ecosystems are the marine equivalent of tropical forests and play just as important a role in maintaining the delicate biological balance of our planet. Unfortunately, they are among the most seriously threatened of ecosystems. The effective protection and preservation of coral reefs should be of concern to the entire international community and should give rise to support for the International Coral Reefs Initiative.

The enormous marine spaces covered by the exclusive economic zones of small island developing States contain the world's last remaining stocks of fish that are not yet being overexploited. The good health and sustainable exploitation of these stocks are of crucial importance.

Tourism plays a particularly important economic role; it must therefore be sustainable, and its promotion, development and management must take into account the many vulnerability factors of these small States.

Countries belonging to the French-speaking group welcome the activities that small island developing States have undertaken to implement the Barbados Programme of Action. Those States have made significant progress in carrying out sustainable development strategies through national and regional activities. The same is true of their regional organizations. Yet they are limited in what they can do. The exacerbation of their environmental and economic problems is a result of events that are largely beyond their control.

Our delegations believe that we must strengthen partnership between small island developing States and the international community at large in order to implement effectively the Barbados Programme of Action. The financial, human and natural resources of these States are, in general, very limited. In fully implementing their sustainable development strategies, these countries would benefit from increased resources, including official development assistance, the decline of which in recent years has had an impact on their sustainable development.

To adapt to a rapidly changing world economic climate, where increased interdependence among individuals means shared values and commitments in promoting human development for all, we need human solidarity and partnership, which are essential factors for community cohesion as well as for economic growth. There must be access to sufficient resources and a broad range of information, materials and services, including affordable communication and transportation, which are generally lacking in these small island States.

In order to meet these needs in a flexible and effective way, we believe that we need to renew our commitments and promises that we undertook at the Barbados Conference. We need to strengthen and develop existing technical assistance programmes and create programmes where this is deemed to be urgent and necessary.

International trade and the terms of trade are vital for the small island developing States, which are among those most dependent on trade. The appropriate regional and international organizations should take into account the specific nature of these States when they evaluate the effects of trade liberalization and globalization. We also need to take into account their economic vulnerability in international and regional trade negotiations. Their situation must be taken into consideration at the next phase of negotiations to be held under the aegis of the World Trade Organization, including the possibility of giving them, as appropriate, special, differentiated treatment. These States need effective support to help them improve and build up their capacities of international trade. We need to give strong encouragement to widespread use of a scale of vulnerability which could possibly supplement other criteria when decisions are made concerning cooperation with small island developing States, including preferential treatment to be given to them.

Better early warning systems are also vital to minimize damage caused by natural disasters. It is essential that we improve waste-water treatment centres, and various sources of national, multilateral and bilateral funding should give higher priority to this matter. Given the dumping of waste and the pollution of the island waters and coastal regions of these States, tougher international action needs to be taken against foreign ships that pollute their coastal waters. National action

alone is not enough. Regional and international action must supplement national policies.

Regional and international organizations must work in close cooperation with Governments to regulate the movement and the transshipment of dangerous and radioactive materials and waste. The right of small island States to ban or regulate the import of dangerous waste must be respected, in conformity with international law. The elaboration of effective regional and international programmes to strengthen the capacity to elaborate and apply appropriate environmental legislation is a matter of considerable importance and urgency.

Turning to the preservation of biodiversity, it is the responsibility of the international community to preserve the coral reefs of small island States. All of these areas must be protected much more effectively than they are now against pollution, erosion and sedimentation.

As they stated at the recent meeting with donors held in New York in February 1999, the small island developing States are determined to improve their energy efficiency. In this respect, the international community must continue to help them to develop various mechanisms to tackle this problem and the related issues of transfer of technology and, as appropriate, to provide assistance in order to develop and use renewable energy sources, including local technologies.

Freshwater resources are very precious for these States. They are threatened because of sea-level rise, rainfall variation, contamination and overuse. Therefore, most of them need ongoing international and regional cooperation to help them to work out and implement integrated management plans for freshwater resources.

The successful implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action means that there must be active cooperation and partnership at the regional and international levels, taking into account the needs and priorities of the States concerned. To that end, the United Nations must continue to act as a catalyst. Small island developing States have always said that they were primarily responsible for their own development. They are facing serious challenges, which makes international solidarity an imperative. Countries belonging to the group of French-speaking countries reaffirm their support for the Barbados Programme of Action and their desire to assist these States in the full implementation of their sustainable development strategies. We must work together and step up our efforts to facilitate the full implementation of the Programme of Action.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Inocencio Arias, chairman of the delegation of Spain.

Mr. Arias (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by welcoming to our Organization the Republics of Kiribati and Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga.

I would like to highlight the satisfaction of my Government for the progress made in the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action and to stress the elements that characterize this group of States that deserve particular attention on the part of the international community. Phenomena such as globalization, the increase in tourism and natural disasters justify a detailed study of how these affect small island developing States and the attention that we should give them in order to bring about sustainable human development for their populations.

We must note that we still have a long way to go. I would stress the following.

First, we should not forget that the main goal of the Programme of Action should continue to be the eradication of poverty and the promotion of the well-being of the population. In this context, my delegation would like to stress the importance of the gender perspective, which must be incorporated decisively in the decisions that are taken.

The globalization of the world economy is an irreversible fact. This phenomenon, with clear positive effects for economic growth, nevertheless implies inescapable risks for the States which, due to their small size, could remain marginalized. Spain understands the problems of many island States which depend on only one or two export commodities that are subject to the vagaries of the international market. It is crucial to adopt the necessary steps to safeguard that income which is fundamental for their development. The Lomé Convention of the European Union is a fundamental instrument in maintaining the resources derived from these exports. Facilitating access of these products to our national markets is therefore crucial.

But, together with this economic change, there are others that will have dire consequences for our future and particularly for that of the small island developing States. I am referring to climate change and its consequences.

The international community has a particular responsibility to take steps to prevent climate deterioration, which seriously threatens the development efforts of island States. Here, I stress the importance of adopting measures to reduce disasters and allocating financial resources to palliate their effects. During the recent donors meeting we were pleased to see many national and regional projects dealing with this issue. The authorities of my country are studying them with great attention.

I would also like to touch upon the importance of tourism. Spain has long experience in this area, since it is a major tourist destination. The impact of the development of tourism can be a sensitive matter with regard to the availability of freshwater, increases in the demand for energy, the overburdening of the infrastructure of the destination country and socio-cultural consequences. Furthermore, the structure of the international tourism industry often leaves most of the economic benefits that it generates in the tourist's country of origin or in the hands of large international companies, thus preventing the small States from reaping all the desired benefits from this activity. Spain therefore favours sustainable tourism that respects the environment and is based on a mutually satisfactory economic relationship.

I would like to conclude by mentioning two issues of particular concern to Spain. I am referring to the international maritime transport of radioactive wastes and the declaration of the Caribbean as a special zone. Spain recognizes the worries concerning the transportation of radioactive material, with all the risks involved in spite of the precautions that are taken, and we are mindful of the CARICOM initiative to declare the Caribbean a special zone in order to address the particular characteristics of that sea. Spain is ready to collaborate on both issues in order to find solutions that, in the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, satisfy all those concerned.

It is clear that only through strong, committed international cooperation will we be able to move forward in meeting the Barbados objectives. Spain is ready and willing to participate actively in this effort.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Dore Gold, chairman of the delegation of Israel.

Mr. Gold (Israel): The bond between the State of Israel and the small island developing States goes beyond the friendly ties we enjoy with many of these nations, and it is broader than the network of Israeli projects and emissaries that have taken root in small island nations across the globe. For we share with these States a core principle: we believe that the need to meet the demands of development, to harness our ever-limited natural resources, transcends borders, binding humanity as a whole in a struggle to make the most of our shared ecosystem.

The small island nations are an integral part of that system and are becoming more and more so as this century draws to a close. Some have made great strides in the field of tourism and have taught the global community much that it did not know, even as they take careful measures against damage to the environment. Others face immediate challenges in the area of sustainable development, which challenges serve as microcosms for the larger environmental challenges facing us all in this domain. It must be understood that the successes of the small island developing States are indeed our successes, and the problems and dilemmas that these nations face are truly our problems and dilemmas as well. The international community should recognize this fact, as it did five years ago, in convening in Barbados the first Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

Israel, in particular, can relate to the many issues affecting small island nations. As a similarly small, overwhelmingly coastal State with few natural resources, we have had to struggle to find imaginative ways to reap the benefits, as well as meet the dangers, of an unpredictable seaboard, changes in climate and the balance between aquifers, all the while maintaining our substantial agricultural base.

More importantly, however, we have made it our national mission to widen the web of cooperation and technology-sharing around the globe, in order to meet the needs of sustainable development. This is best illustrated in our missions in small islands around the globe, where Israel has taken action and steps to fulfil both the letter and the spirit of the Barbados Programme of Action. MASHAV, Israel's Center for International Cooperation, is dedicated to bringing the best of Israel's own methods and expertise to cooperative efforts with other nations. Hundreds of trainees from small island States, notably in the Caribbean and the Pacific, have benefited from MASHAV courses, especially in agriculture and rural development, but also in management, community development and a series of on-the-spot training seminars.

At the same time, Israeli experts have fanned out around the globe, launching information-sharing projects in many small island developing States. Indeed, Israel is a world leader in the use of water desalination to handle the irrigation needs of coastal areas like small islands. Thus, for example, an Israeli agricultural specialist went on a five-year mission to a variety of Pacific island States. In conjunction with this work, a renowned Israeli citrus expert undertook a two-year mission in Papua New Guinea. On-the-spot seminars were similarly set up in small island States in the Caribbean and elsewhere.

Another area of particular importance for our country is disaster relief — and it is no less important for small island developing States. For example, Israel sent a special medical team, along with some $30,000 in aid, to Papua New Guinea, following the 1998 tsunami, in which an underwater earthquake unleashed tidal waves over the western shore, wreaking devastation that cost the lives of some 7,000 people. Israel's teams immediately rushed to the scene, integrating into the local hospital system and the long-term relief programmes. Along similar lines, Israel sent aid and resource teams to the nations ravaged by hurricane George, such as Saint Kitts and Nevis.

Israel enjoys a special relationship of mutual trust and goodwill with the Federated States of Micronesia. That was most recently reflected this past year, when Israel sent a special team from the Mekorot company to assist in repairing the damage to Micronesia's water supply resulting from El Niño.

But the ties between Israel and small island developing States extend beyond agricultural techniques. We have launched joint ventures with a number of such States in areas such as medicine, education and management. Still, there remains great untapped potential for further cooperation. We have, for example, developed a new course in agricultural meteorology, which we hope to offer particularly to students from small island developing States. We would also like to enhance our role in global conferences and groups that deal with the collective issues faced by the small island developing States.

We stand here today, not only as a nation with much in common with the small island developing States, but as strong believers in the shared goals of the global community to meet the needs of sustainable development. And we bring our own contributions as examples of that principle. The challenges, accomplishments and potential value of the small island developing States transcend borders and oceans. It is imperative that we do the same.

Let me just add that we are now witnessing the independence of more small islands in the Pacific theatre and it is this independence that, at the end of this century, perhaps best marks the end of the long process of decolonization. During that process, which began at the end of the Second World War, many newly independent States actually joined forces here in the United Nations in diplomatic coalitions that were hostile to the State of Israel.

May I say here that it is my hope that that era is over. We are now entering a new century, where the coalitions of the past and the considerations of the past must change. We no longer live in a cold-war era. We no longer live in an era in which the considerations of fossil-fuel producers will affect fundamentally the future of the world economy. We are entering an era in which communications, satellite communications and information technology will be the great source of the creation of international wealth. Let us build together a new coalition of developing countries that seek to work together with the State of Israel for a better future and for a better century.

Let me say this to the members of the General Assembly: Stand by us in the future; the State of Israel will stand by you.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.